Early Education of the Young Blind Child

Advice for Parents

HV1974
.E276
1976

M.C. MIGEL LIBRARY
AMERICAN PRINTING
HOUSE FOR THE BLIND

c.1

Early Education of the Young Blind Child

Advice for Parents

Editor:

Blinden-und-Sehschwachen-Verband
der DDR

This pamphlet is the 22nd title in a series published by Blinden-und-Sehschwachen-Verband der DDR in preparation of the International Symposium on Problems concerning the Pre-School Education of Blind Children as well as Parent's Guidance, Berlin, 1976

HV1974
E276
Copy [illegible]

Edited by Zentralvorstand des Blinden-und-Sehschwachen-Verbandes der DDR. Address: DDR 102 Berlin, Poststraße 4—5. With cooperation of Dipl.-Päd. Manfred Binar; Dipl.-Päd. Uta Binar; Dr. paed. Rita Degenhardt; Dr. sc. med. Gerhard Goder; Dipl.-Päd. Elisabeth Iser; Ernst Löser, Oberstudienrat; Ruth Merkel; Irmgard Müller; Dipl.-Jur. Christian Sawallich; Dr. paed. Günter Thiele; Dr. paed. Rosemarie Wagner; Prof. Dr. sc. paed. Wolfgang Fromm, author. Illustrations: Archive, Bolle, Frikell, Gold, Sawallich, Simmrow.

Publishers: Deutsche Zentralbücherei für Blinde zu Leipzig.
VLN 470.170/6/76
Printed by Druckhaus Freiheit Halle
Price: M 1.—

Introduction

Steady progress in medical sciences in recent years has provided a better chance for detection in earliest childhood of biological damage and for early medical action. Implied is an important prerequisite for early onset of special education of handicapped children, complementary to medical care.

Blind children are comparable to children with other defects, in that both the very substance and the methods of early education are likely to have strong bearings on the buildup of their personality. Blindness, absence of visual perception, may have negative impact on the entire physical and intellectual growth of a child. Detrimental consequences may include retardation or malformation in the context of mobility, speech, thought, and social behaviours. Such shortcomings, no doubt, will be obstacles to a smooth expansion of identity and to learning at school. The high demands made by socialist society upon general education of all then will be difficult or hardly to meet by the blind child. If, however, the negative effects of blindness can be eliminated or mitigated by blindness-oriented teaching as early as in the first years of life, those children will enter school with best possible fitness. That, after all, is the purpose of early detection, early registration, and early education.

The terms of early detection and early registration usually are used independent of age. Early registration means registration at the earliest possible date from occurrence of blindness to minimise or rule out loss of time up to the commencement of blind-specific attention. Early registration, therefore, may be related to persons in advanced age as well, if blindness is acquired later.

The terms of early registration and early education in this pamphlet will be applied to children whose blindness has been congenital or acquired in early age. All steps of early education, in the context of this pamphlet, are related to the period between outbreak of blindness in infant age (or detection of blindness at birth) and admission to school.

There is no doubt that we shall accomplish our humanist duty to educate blind children as well to fully developed socialist personalities, if the above period of time is intensively utilised for blindness-oriented education. The Minister of Education of the GDR in his keynote address to this country's VIIth Paedagogical Congress made an explicit call for early registration of handicapped children and for strongest emphasis on early education.

Much has to be done by parents, in this context, since most blind children will spend their first years of age in the family. Mother and father are the persons who, consequently, control the education of infants and young children, and thus it is up to them to provide a sound basis for further progress. Much depends on their paedagogical action and success in answering the question, if the potential effects of blindness will consolidate or fade away.

The parents' attitude towards their own child and its blindness plays a decisive role. Family environment can be stimulating but also inhibitory to a child's development. The knowledge of having a blind child should coincide with the beginning of special care for that child's life progress. Care and concern will not necessarily lead to irresolutedness on the side of the parents, if these know about the peculiarities of blindness and learn how to treat and educate their child under such extraordinary conditions. This pamphlet has been prepared with the view to disseminating such knowledge among parents concerned and to giving them a helping hand for successful early education of their blind child.

Tactility of child develops while playing

1.

The ophthalmologist's view of blindness in child age

The term of blindness, in its strict medical meaning, can be applied only to a person who cannot even perceive a glint of light. Yet, such narrow use of the term often will prove impractical, since a child, for example, who can perceive only such glint or blurred outlines of its environment will be so strongly handicapped for all sorts of activities that it must be placed on the same level with a completely blind child. Advantage can be taken even of smallest amounts of residual vision, for example, for orientation in space, but a child handicapped to such extent must be looked after, as if it was fully blind.

Therefore, several different definitions will be used for blindness, depending on the context, social, educational, vocational or others. A school child, for example, is defined as being blind, if it cannot use writing of the sighted. Such child will be admitted to a special school for the blind (Act on Integrated Socialist Education System, 5th implementation clause). Blindness is further categorised by several stages for the purpose of social services (e. g. payment of blindness allowance).

In the GDR, the definition of blindness is applied to persons whose vision is less than 1/25 of normal visual acuity. The level of visual acuity and the kind of an eye disease can be established with high accuracy by thorough ophthalmological examination, full-scale checking and clear-cut results being possible in all age groups. Infants and young children will be examined in general anaesthesia. Advanced techniques of electrophysiology are available

Examination with the ophthalmoscope doesn't hurt

for comprehensive testing of all visual functions, including the refraction capacity of a newborn's eyes.

All organic diseases which develop in childhood differ by certain peculiarities from the same pathological conditions in adult age, which applies to eye diseases as well. For that reason, child-age ophthalmology has been invented as a special line of general ophthalmology. There are certain diseases with primordial embryonic genesis and full-scale development after birth. Others may have outbreaks due to environmental effects immediately after birth or in the first years of age. Included in the first category are hereditary diseases affecting exclusively the eye or the eye in concomitance with other organs as well as malformations caused by all sorts of pathogenetic interference with embryonic maturation.

Pathogenetic factors may be placental anoxia (e. g. caused by haemorrhage), toxins (viruses or bacterial toxins, nicotine, uncontrolled intake of medicaments), and injuries. Abortion practised by laymen used to be among the causes of injuries with severe consequences to the newborn up to some years ago. In the meantime, that category of causes of blindness has been eliminated from the German Democratic Republic by free legal abortion under competent medical control as well as by other means of pregnancy prevention and birth control which have given every woman in this country free choice to have children at her most convenient date. Sometimes, an ophthalmologist may not succeed in establishing unambiguous evidence as to the cause of a given eye condition, since parents may withhold necessary information because of guilty conscience or unacceptable sense of shame or because the pathogenetic factors went unnoticed by the child's mother.

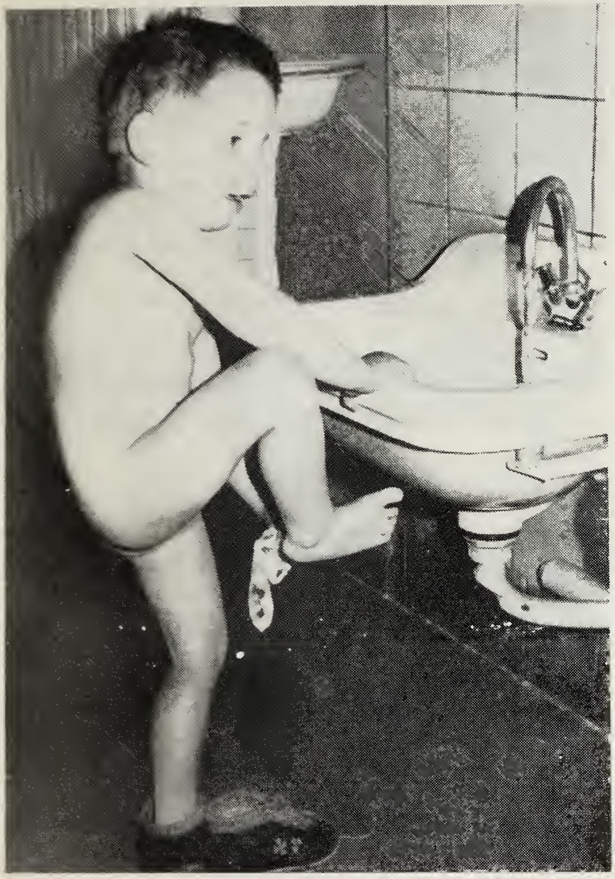
Efficient therapy always will depend on efficient diagnosis, with all causes and aspects of the eye disease being fully detected and understood. The patient's case history is of greatest importance to the doctor. Therefore, parents are required to provide full information on the occurrence of the same or similar diseases in relatives. Such information quite often may reveal the hereditary nature of a disease, the hereditary course, and severity. Great diagnostic importance must be attributed also to information about the child's general development, including its physical movement which has close bearings on vision. Two-eyes fixation should be developed by the eighth week of age. The infant should have learnt to reach out for objects displayed within reach by the third month of age. Hence, parents can note disturbed vision even in such early age and see an ophthalmologist.

There are additional signs of warning, but, unfortunately, many parents will note them too late or not a all. Deviation of one eye from the two-eyes visual direction is one of them. Three to four per cent of all children tend towards strabismus. Frequent or permanent monocular strabismus may cause strabismal amblyopia. Treatment is possible in an early phase, but prevention by early diagnosis is preferable.

Squint position, after all, can be a manifestation of retinoblastoma, a life-endangering retinal growth. Early detection followed by early treatment, for which most up-to-date methods are available, can overt the vital risk and even help to retain part of the visual function. Statistically, retinoblastoma has been found to occur only in one of 20,000 children and only in 25 per cent of all cases in both eyes, but the very sad condition of the affected children should prompt all parents to see a doctor without delay, as soon as they discover any conspicuous symptom in their children's eyes.

Excessive size of a child's eye may justify suspicion of congenital glaucoma (buphthalmos) which must be treated as early as possible.

Congenital grey cataract (opaqueness of the lens) cannot be recognised by an untrained person unless its manifestation is strong in terms of excessive discoloration of the pupil. The cause can be hereditary as well, but grey cataract also can be a consequence or sequel of rubella with which the child's mother had been afflicted in the first three month of pregnancy. Grey



He can really wash himself alone

cataract may be cured by surgical treatment, which will be applied even in the first year of age, if the disease is binocular.

The younger a child the more serious are inflammations of the eye. Inflammatory processes due to gonorrhoea, transmitted from mother to child in the course of parturition, is hardly found any longer among the causes of blindness, a situation achieved by Credé's prophylaxis, that is instillation of silver nitrate solution into the newborn's eyes immediately after parturition.

However, corneitis due to measles has remained to be a risk, although measles, fortunately, have been almost eliminated as a paediatric disease thanks to general prophylactic immunisation. The rate of eye injuries with severe consequences still is high among children, particularly boys. Unsuitable toys are among the most common causes of injuries, for example, small firearms, air-guns, darts, bow and arrow, firecrackers, cutting tools (the habit to cut open shoe-strings by means of a knife), and splintering glass (preserving jars or bottles of carbonated beverages). The incidence of acid burns has been growing in recent time on account of growing domestic use of chemicals, such as detergents or stain removers.

Great responsibility for prevention and successful treatment of eye diseases in childhood is borne by the parents. Many a disease of the eye can be cured or avoided at all, if parents exhibit a helpful attitude by careful observation of their own children or early consultation of an ophthalmologist. The outbreak of diseases can be prevented which may otherwise handicap a child's vision throughout life.

2.

What are the differences between blind and sighted children?

Comprehensive and high-accuracy studies have been conducted, against the background of Marxist developmental psychology, into what phases of human activity are undergone by the infant. The development of motoricity, sensory activity, speech, thought, social behaviours, and playing habits was found to take place in defined phases in infant life.

Any comparison between blind and sighted children in the context of the above developmental phases should not be made under the assumption that sightedness was the only sensory activity which was eliminated, whereas all the other senses undergo normal development just as they would do in a sighted child. Blindness, as a primary defect, will entail a number of additional or secondary defects. Those secondary defects can be quite complex, and in an unfavourable case they will have negative bearings upon all aspects of the personality concerned. Such complex of secondary defects, however, does not become manifest as a sum of individual defects. It is of a highly sophisticated structure with many elements which are all correlated in many ways.

Numerous attempts have already been made to describe the phenomenon of the blind child with reference to the above complex. Yet, so far a consistent description of infantile blindness with all its aspects and of general validity has proved to be hardly feasible on account of too much differentiation in the problem. For example, there are different degrees of blindness; blindness can be acquired at most various stages in life, and even blindness in childhood will be under the impact of highly variegated environmental effects. The following considerations should be understood with such limitation.

The following three characteristic phenomena, studied by M. I. Semzova, a Soviet educationist of blind people, may be recorded quite generally from blind infants:

(a) Blind children are physically and psychically retarded in comparison to sighted children. Major elements of that retardation include restricted capacity to gain experience, less developed imagination, less trained motoricity, and reduced activity to get to grips with the environment.

(b) The development of a blind child is characterised by irregularity, because the phases involved are not congruent with those undergone by a sighted child. This particular handicap will come to be less pronounced, as soon as the child has learnt to make up for blindness by using its brain and other sense organs. This achievement is called compensation.

(c) Speech, memory, and some other aspects of the personality are less affected by blindness and will develop at a higher rate. Other aspects, including motoricity and sense of space, are more strongly retarded.

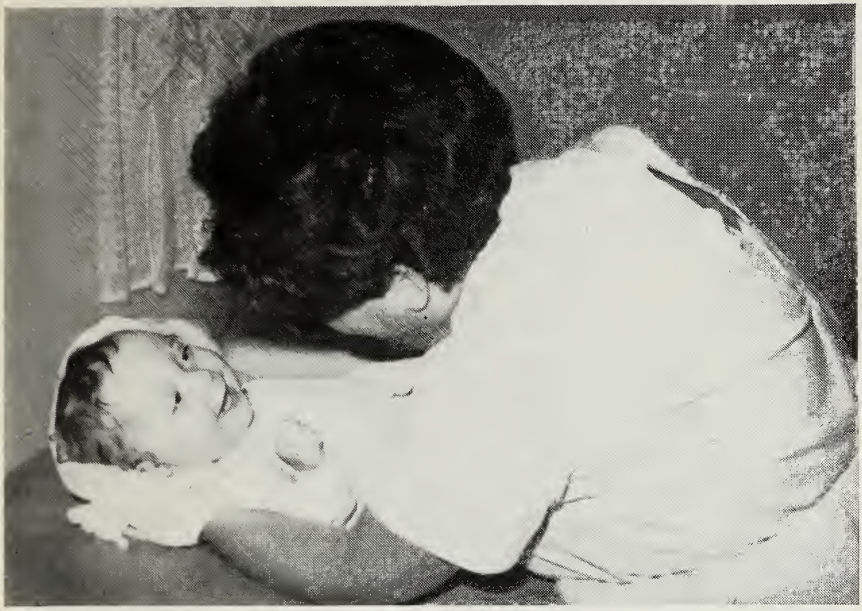
A sighted infant will have developed differentiated reactivity to different movements of the eye. The first reaction will be to the display of a lustrous object which will be focused. An infant, about three month of age, will move its eyes to follow a moving object. The infant will gradually learn to differentiate, for example, to respond to mother's smile. Colour differentiation will follow soon.

Exact knowledge of outlines and dimensions will be obtained not only through vision, but also by touching. The first moves to touch objects will be untargeted and clumsy, which, however, will improve very soon. Vision thus is the basis for coordination of movements and, consequently, the prerequisite for adequate motoricity at large.

A blind child of the same age still is widely passive. It cannot see anything and, consequently, not react to still or moving objects in its environment. The use of hands in a moving reaction to visual perception will not take place, and even affinity for known persons can be delayed.

Motoricity and its development, consequently, depends strongly on vision, and this applies not only to hand movement, but to all motoric responses of the human body. For example, the blind child has no incentive for raising its head or for sitting up, and it will hardly start walking on its own along with growing age. Creeping, as a means of fast forward movement, often is avoided at all by blind infants. The imitative impulse is suppressed, and a somewhat remote toy does not represent any stimulation for getting closer to it by fast movement.

Beginning attempts to move sometimes are disrupted by unpleasant experience, if, for example, a blind infant has become frightened by pain after having run against an obstacle. Such suppression of the movement impulse may result not only in retardation of motoricity, but in lack of movement as a whole which then will be replaced by stereotype movement to mark



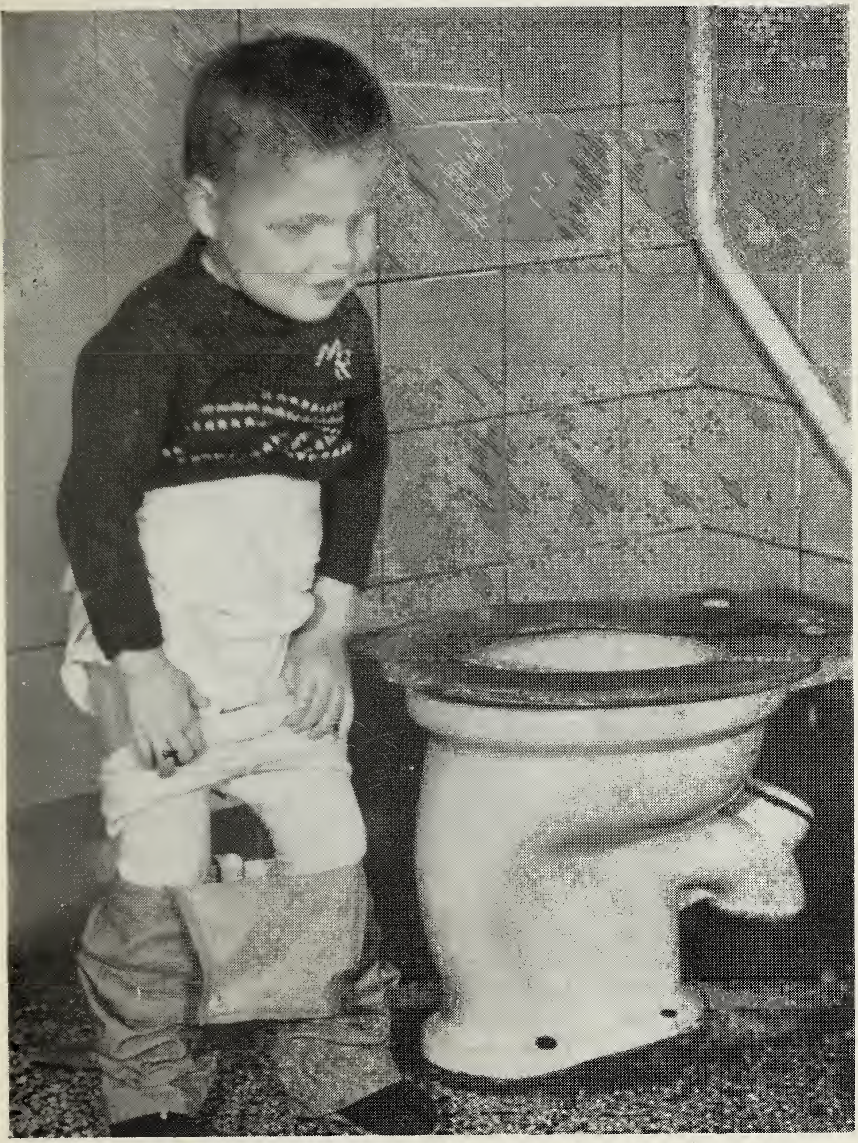
Also the blind baby reacts with a smile when addressed affectionately

time, swaying and swinging of the upper part of the body, and unmotivated turning of the head.

While, in general, hearing is normally developed in a blind infant, response to acoustic signals will differ from the reaction exhibited by a sighted child. Outside aid is needed to build a relationship between hearing and touching or hearing and walking. Nevertheless, when it comes to contact with the environment and other persons, greatest importance must be attributed to hearing. It is the sense of hearing which enables perception and learning of the sounds of speech, although the development of speech can be retarded by absence of the possibility to imitate mouth movements. Insufficient illustrativeness is another factor with negative impact on speech communication. No correct images will be formed, and the development of thought will be retarded unless a concrete imaginative link is always established between an object and its oral expression, the word. Poor vocabulary is quite plausible, at least in the early phases of development, if one considers that a sighted child often will seek and find spoken expressions for objects which come to its sight.

The infant's social relations are also important to the buildup of a personality. A blind child with no chance to contact other children will have problems in developing positive social behaviours, such as integration with a community, attention for playmates, mutual assistance in all sorts of action, and comradeship. Some delay then will be experienced also regarding certain skills and knowledge that can be obtained only in a community. Resulting from such delay can be negative effects on independence, playing activity in a kindergarten environment, and classroom learning.

Retardation in the development of motoricity, speech, thought, and social behaviours may, in unfavourable circumstances, restrict the radius of a blind child's experience to the extent that its quantitative and qualitative knowledge of the environment will lag behind the knowledge of sighted children of the same age. That is why blind-specific early education is of enormous importance to the personality of infants and young children in pre-school age and essential to their preparation for school entry.



To put on one's clothes oneself must be learned

3.

Specific action for early registration

The reader of the first chapter should have learnt that in spite of tremendous medical progress there still are diseases of the eye which may result in childhood blindness. Blindness has the smallest incidence among all physico-psychic defects in early childhood, but the children affected and their parents find themselves in quite a difficult situation with the possibility of negative impact upon development as a whole. That was the idea of the second chapter. The socialist society is deeply concerned with the duty to provide effective assistance for parents who have to deal with problems of the aforesaid kind, Medical treatment and all complementary medical services are comprehensive and free, but, in addition to these, parents and their children receive social, material, and educational assistance.

The blind child in socialist society is given equal opportunity. All practicable careers are offered, and adequate school education and vocational training are provided, Fullest possible integration of all handicapped citizens, including the blind children, is demanded and encouraged by government at all levels, and appropriate efforts are being made with widest possible involvement and cooperation of all applicable institutions and organisations, social forces, and the parents, last but not least. A major socialist policy is fully applied to this sphere of life: Interest of the individual must be harmonised with interest of society.

Social integration of handicapped persons is undertaken on the basis of valid law. Article 25 in The Constitution of the German Democratic Republic is the principal reference for all action. Section Five of that Article provides for special school education and specialised vocational training for children and adults with physical and psychic handicaps.

A voluminous set of implementation clauses has come into force, in the

All disks must be arranged according to their size

meantime, to provide a comprehensive system according to which the above constitutional principle is put into practice. Those implementation clauses are complemented and reinforced by resolutions of organisations of the general public, such as People's Solidarity Organisation, The Red Cross Society, unions, children's and youth organisations, and, last but not least, Blinden-und-Sehschwachen-Verband der DDR.

Social services for blind infants will not come to full effectiveness unless early registration of the children concerned is secured through the proper authorities. In the GDR, early registration of handicapped persons is under the responsibility of the health and social services at local government level. They will keep lists of persons in need of special services and undertake initial action to provide them, and, in the interest of continuity, they will pass appropriate information to other organisations of the public and institutions that will take over or provide additional support.

Early information of the proper authorities of any person in need of special care is compulsory by law. All cases of manifest or imminent physical and mental defects, including impairment of vision or hearing, must be reported. Both the categories of persons who are potential subjects of reporting and those under the obligation of reporting are so large under the mandatory rules in force that gapless registration is possible. Physicians, non-medical practitioners, medical ancillaries and orderlies, nurses, midwives, massage personnel, physiotherapists, social workers, educationists, parents, and all other persons in charge of child education are under legal obligation to report defects as soon as they come to their knowledge and not later than eight days after such knowledge has been gained.

Section 3 of Para 2 of the Act is of particular importance: Every medical practitioner und midwife shall immediately examine a newborn for manifest or imminent disorders (See Anordnung, 12. 5. 1954, Zentralblatt, p. 194).

Additional executive orders are given in “Richtlinien für die Arbeit der Beratungsstellen des Kinder- und Jugendgesundheitsschutzes” (Rules and Codes of Practice of Medical Children and Youth Care Centres), dated February 21st, 1966. Those centres are part of the national system of medical supervision and prevention, with early registration of blind children being one of their duties. The rules provide, for example, that in all sorts of routine checks of groups and individuals early registration of endangered and handicapped children must be part oft the check. Those children have to be earmarked for follow-up observation and attention through the local medical youth-care officer or for transfer to a specialist.

Early detection and early registration are the means to secure early initiation of prophylactic and therapeutic action, blind-specific education, and age-dependent admission to special pre-school centres or schools for blind children.

The existing legal provisions and their resulting institutionalised facilities for early registration and early education, consequently, are essential to taking advantage of all potentials available for education and training of blind children, and this is to help even blind people with their severe physical handicap to attain to the goal of socialist education, the universally educated and harmoniously developed personality.

4.

Specific early education of blind children – its impact on development in pre-school age

---

Certain needs and possibilities of specific education in early childhood and streamlined to overcoming limitations and retardation due to blindness in various facets of a growing personality may be derived from the peculiarities in the development of blind infants to which reference had been made in the second chapter. Education in the first years of age is of such great importance, because the skills and habits acquired in such early phase will represent a substantive foundation for learning in the classroom.

Teaching at school in the socialist system can begin with high standards on the very first day after entry, because it usually has been preceded by adequate pre-school education where all faculties and potentialities of the child's personality have been fully mobilised. A child that has passed through such education before school age will have acquired sizeable knowledge of its own environment, and it will have come to the command of so many activities which are now essential to systematic learning.

The playing child in a socialist pre-school system is made familiar with many physical objects and social implications, and by playing it will imitate activities which contain elements of learning and vocational activity.

The proverbial wisdom of "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" cannot be accepted in such an absolute form by Marxist learning psychology. Otherwise would no successful further education be possible for adult workers. Yet, early learning remains to be a safe basis for further learning throughout life.

Pre-school activities depend strongly on the influence taken by surrounding

How to learn to go upstairs

adults. The unity of and correlation between development and education are explicitly emphasised in Marxist psychology, and Rubinstein, a psychologist of the USSR, has suggested that a child's progress will depend on both education and formative development. Hence, to create favourable conditions for development of such formative nature means nothing but systematic education and formation. Particular responsibility, in this context, is shouldered by a child's parents and other family members.

A postulation often is made to the effect that there should be no difference in attitude towards a blind or sighted child. Such advice is only a partial truth. It is true to the extent to which exaggerated compassion and nervous solicitude as well as carelessness and indifference are harmful to a blind child, because too little demands are made on it, and the result will be further retardation. Therefore, on principle and under that aspect, a blind child should be looked at in a "normal" way, as a child who can learn how to move, play, learn, and work for social adaptation. Once, such insight has

Would you mind me riding your tricycle?

been gained, it will not be too difficult to think of ways and additional aids by which such "normal" development can be further promoted.

Certain peculiar aspects relating to motoricity deserve particular attention as early as in the first months of age, since some of the basic skills acquired then will be of great relevance to movement and orientation in space throughout life. A blind infant's passivity can be overcome by deliberate stimulation of movements, such as reaching, head turning, sitting, and upright standing.

Specific physical exercises for infants are suitable, in the above context, but, in addition to these, the child must be categorically encouraged to touch things. Degenhardt proposed to give loosely crumpled tinfoil paper into the blind child's hands. It will certainly like it because of the rustling sound, good touch, and light reflexes, the latter aspect being important to children with some residual vision.

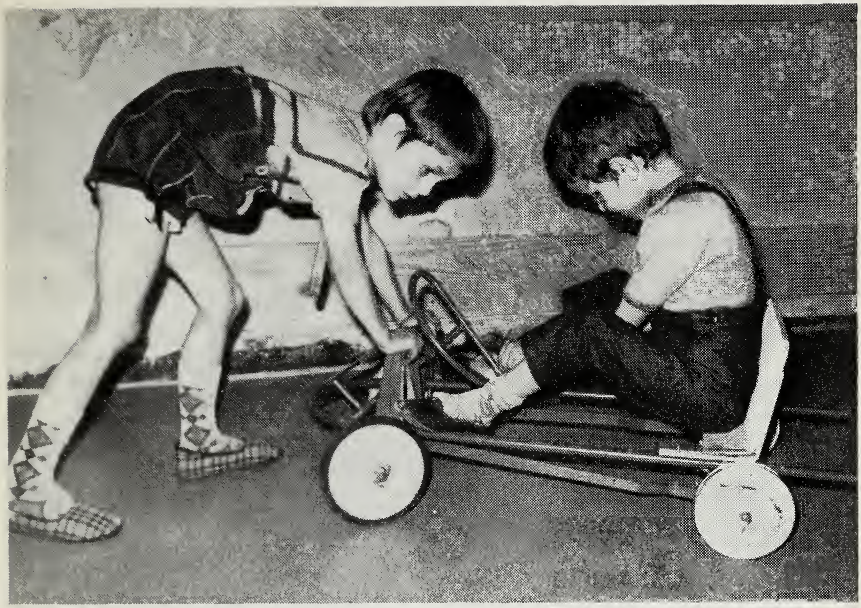
Even the blind child will learn very soon that the bottle with liquid food gives pleasure and satisfaction. Let the bottle be offered with accompanying acoustic signals, and the child will have a strong motivation to reach out for it. Such exercises can be continued by means of acoustic toys with pleasant-to-touch shape and surface to train coordinated movement in response to acoustic impressions. The resulting skill may be just as good as that of a sighted child who responds to optical impressions.

Sitting and standing must be combined with pleasant impressions to give the infant stronger motivation for such activities. Even if it is only a very friendly gesture made by the mother to her sitting child, the impression will be strong enough for the infant to stimulate repetition.

Mobility education is part of physical education and oriented to general health, physical and psychic growth, more motoricskills, and good posture. Therefore, in early education of the blind infant nothing should be omitted apt to encourage movement. Stereotype physical movements to mark time usually are a symptom of a wrong course of the natural mobility impulse.

In such situations, a child must not be abandoned and left to itself. Those able to understand verbal instructions should be verbally addressed and talked into certain directions, and their posture should be continuously corrected. One should always bear in mind that the child has no example for correct courses of movements and that imitation of optical impressions is not possible.

Orientation in an enclosed space may be supported by using acoustic signals. However, no obstacles should be in the way of a child's movement. They would be sources of potential injury. No safe orientation will be obtainable unless the child is given full confidence in its own performance and a sense of accomplishment. Therefore, independent movement in a room should not be prohibited, provided that all precautions have been taken. Potential



To play together with a seeing friend is especially fine

sources of danger should be drawn to the child's attention to make it learn how to avoid them.

The radius of permissible movement should be gradually enlarged in proportion to growing safety and personal autonomy. That permissible radius will have to grow from the playpen to a whole room and flat and the vicinity of the flat to eventually include the whole building and its environment. The child's independence can be systematically enlarged and enhanced by guiding its hand, the controlling directional movement by calls, then permitting independent movement without any direct aid.

However, those elementary movement exercises are only part of motoricity education and a basis for harmonious sequential movement in kindergarten age. When kindergarten age has been reached and blind-dependent retardation overcome by mobility exercises, music will come in as an additional method of early education and basis for better mobility. Music is a method to train the faculty of compensation, to elevate mobility skills through the by-pass of musical hearing.

Musical activity is likely to encourage the activity of the children as a whole. It is helpful in controlling high-economy movement, and it will strengthen expression. Acoustic and motor differentiation as well as concentration and reaction are promoted. The use of music as a specific approach to mobility education will impart a somewhat playful nature to the exercises and, therefore, add to fun in doing things, which, no doubt, is an advantage. It is for all those reasons that musical-rhythmic mobility education ranks high in pre-school education of blind children.

Suitable children's songs and carefully selected movement games will be chosen to translate rhythmic speech and music impulses into movement. Sensory experience and mobility skills are thus attained and deepened. Collective exercises are greatly useful also because they will stimulate social relations and enhance social behaviours. Inhibition of movement or locophobia can be overcome by playing. In such exercises, quite a bit of emphasis is laid on the use of rhythmic instruments, in order to elevate the children's manual skilfulness. The children will be asked in such courses to localise the sound sources and to differentiate between various acoustic signals. Therefore, education of hearing is another accompanying benefit.

An acoustically perceivable reference point may be fixed in a given room, for example, the mid-point of a circle, for safe moving along and orientation. All moves now are made after standardised verbal commands, with equal types of moves always being accompanied by one and the same rhythmic signal. That has proved to be a good way to combine mobility education with sensory education, and the results are better attentiveness and concentration together with immediate reaction.

For participation in musico-rhythmic mobility exercises the children should know some songs and be able to recognise a known melody or rhythm and to differentiate between the sounds produced by various instruments. Two examples (according to Iser) have been chosen to demonstrate some ways to undertake such exercises. The examples given will be best suitable for a kindergarten group, but they can be played also in the family, for example, at birthday parties for which children from the neighbourhood have been invited.

First example: Text of song

Waving high my coloured flag
Is to me the greatest gag.
Right to left, and left to right;
Flying easy like a kite.

The children then will make movements after the above text. During the first two measures, the children hold the little flag in their left hand at eye

During musical and rhythmical training

level and tip with their right hand the rhythm against the flag paper. In the third and fourth measures they wave the flags in regular speed. Alteration between right and left is possible.

Second example: Each of the rhythmic instruments used in the game command a certain kind of movement, for example, tambourine for walking, wood-block drum for faster walking, tambourine with bells for jumping with closed feet, and cymbals for sitting. The children are asked to move along a row of chairs arranged for them. Movements must be in rhythmic speed and according to the instruments used.

The two exercises and many similar music-based mobility games are intended to translate rhythmic signals into deliberate movements and to coordinate courses of movements with acoustic impressions. The children are taught new forms of movement. Their orientation in space is consolidated, and they learn how to use in a meaningful way a number of directional terms, such as right, left, up, and down. Their hearing will be trained as well. All participants, after all, are challenged to be all ears, react immediately, and get integrated with the whole group without considering that as a coercion. The above examples also show that specific early education of blind children is not by necessity directly oriented to compensation of blindness. Many methods are available to contribute to all aspects of a personality in early education, with the view to tackling the totality of negative effects of blindness.

Similar concepts apply to speech and thought education, with high responsibility being shouldered by the parents, particularly in the early years of age, as they are first who have a chance to take influence on speech education. Retardation of speech quite often is observed from blind children. They will learn speaking later than sighted children do, and at the beginning their used vocabulary will be below their own age norm. That shortcoming is attributable to the absence of optical stimulation to speak. An unseen object does not really produce a desire to use and define it and to ask for it. The blind child is unable to see the movement of another person's talking mouth and, therefore, cannot imitate lip movement. It will not know where words come from unless it is allowed to feel with its fingers the talking lips of father and mother and to feel the breath of talking on its own cheek. The absence of any optical speech stimulus must be made up for by acoustic stimulation. Therefore, in a blind infant the hearing of sounds must be combined with reaching out for objects and touching them as an incentive for talking.

Parents must be an example also in terms of speech, which will be of greatest importance to their child's speech education. Parents should talk with their child as often as possible and see to clear and articulate pronunciation. There is always an occasion to talk to a child and thus to enrich its vocabulary and imagination. Washing, dressing, and undressing, for example, can be accompanied by touching the respective parts of the body and calling them by their proper names (nose, ear, mouth, leg, foot, toe, etc.).

Children's prattle should be avoided in any talk, as it is nothing but an obstacle to speech education. All objects the child comes across must be called by their proper names, since unity of object and name is of greater importance to blind children than it is in any other situation.

Hence, whenever we mention an object, we should let the child touch it for careful examination. The child will thus get familiar with the given relationship between the abstract word and concrete object. Such careful examination will, at the same time, encourage and mobilise the use of the other senses, such as tactile sense and sense of smell. All that will be of substantive help to the child to form in its mind proper imaginations and pictures of things.

She knows already how to cook a soup

Once, a certain number of terms has thus been accumulated by the child, one can gradually begin to refer to things that cannot be touched, since the child's vocabulary will be big enough to define them in a simple language.

Such more abstract reference may include colours. The blind child (with no residual vision), of course, will be unable to imagine the difference between a blue cloth and a red one, but it must learn that lawn is green and cleared up skies blue and that certain colours match for fashion, while others do not. Therefore, an object always should be mentioned together with its colour.

One must never forget in early speech education that the range of objects perceivable by a blind child is far below that perceivable by sighted children. The blind child must do without any picture books, and in its environment it can perceive only objects which it can touch with its own hands. Much can be done to deliberately place things close to a child and to draw them to its attention.

Handling things accompanied by verbal comment is also essential to speech education. The child will thus not only gain more knowledge about the functions of things, but it will also learn how to describe activities and events. Such approach may enrich the vocabulary of the child and to figure out environmental correlations and to describe them. All that is important to the development of brainwork capacity. A blind child, just as its sighted sisters and brothers, must know about the importance to man of environmental things and developments, about their purpose and about the way to use them.

Playing is the specific way in which a child deals with its environment. Therefore, playing must be used as a channel through which to provide the child with necessary skills, knowledge, and enlightenment. The following idea once has been expressed by Gorki: "Play is the road on which children will discern the world in which they are to live and which they are chosen to change." That statement carried the full importance which must be attributed to play in the context of children's cognitive activity.

The additional importance in a wider context of play to the formation of behaviours may be seen from the following quotation from Makarenko: "Play is of great importance in a child's life. To children it is just as important as vocational activity and service in general are to adults. A child's attitude to playing will in many respects be similar to the same adult person's attitude to work." Therefore, playing, in fact, is important for all children, including the blind ones.

However, while the sighted child often will begin to play on its own in response to optical stimulation from its environment or owing to the company of playmates, the blind child will exhibit some passivity in this context as well.

The principles suggested with regard to mobility and speech education are applicable also to education for playing activity: Parents can and should take advantage of many possibilities to stimulate playing of their child, since it will be in the context of playing action that blindness-dependent shortcomings can be overcome.

Playing starts as early as in infant age by frequent repetition of certain movements and activities. Things will be touched, in the first year of age, lids will be opened and closed, and toy animals moved from place to place. The child will have a sense of pleasure, satisfaction, and accomplishment with its own movements, its own motor performance, and the results.

Those functional plays, important as they are to functional movement and to the development of manual skills, usually will be undertaken by the blind infant only after the parents' encouragement and instruction. All things must be put into the child's hands, and sometimes its hands must be

That way she will be washing her own baby one day guided, for example, to touch an object. The child will prick its ears and listen to the sound and wish to imitate the event.

The first toys offered should be simple in shape and smooth in surface. The child's desire for having and using the toy may be stimulated by selecting something that sounds, such as rattle, humming-top or squeaking animals.

Normally, the second year of age will be characterised by the onset of another form of playing, that is rôle or impersonation plays. The child will tend to transpose itself into different rôles, that of a mother feeding her doll, that of a salesman or a driver. Impersonation reflects a child's experience. It goes without saying that a blind child will hardly come to playful impersonation by itself or restrict the game to acoustic imitation.

Degenhardt, in making reference to the similarity between the rôle play and radio play, pointed out that a blind child impersonating a driver will imitate the sound of the engine, but it will neither do any complementary activity nor use objects. That is another point at which parents, sisters, and brothers must come in to teach the impersonating child experience not obtainable by independent observation.

Similar aspects hold for another group or category of play, that is constructional playing activity. The child can learn proper use of non-living material, such as building bricks which may be put together, say, to build a tower. Plug-in bricks may be used to build smaller structures which will not collapse when touched by the blind child's hands. The parents' restfulness and patience in staying on with their playing child will be transmitted to the latter, and this will be of great help for the child to manage blindness-dependent problems it may face in such activity.

Round games, such as games of dice, table games, and numbers pools, are of didactic nature. They are in a special way designed to gaining and consolidating knowledge and imparting to the playing child certain behaviours of collective learning and competition. Those games have a very particular meaning to the blind children, since they are apt to lead them out of social isolation for full involvement in a collective on an equal footing with all. A number of didactic games, therefore, has been developed especially for blind children, among them puzzles as well as counting, dice, board, and card games. They are all available from the Distribution Centre for Aids for the Blind. By handling toys, the child can acquire ideas of shape, quantity, and dimension. Preferable in early childhood are games made up of components which can be creatively modified, for example, disassembled and reassembled in different variants. The child thus will learn something about exterior characteristics, such as size, shape, and surface, and three-dimensional relations.

There is a wide variety of playing possibilities, and the following hints might prove worth-while, when it comes to using them all:

What a big nose!

1. Stimulate your child's interest in playing and play things!

2. Choose toys of simple and unambiguous shapes and with readily palpable distinctive features!

3. Provide play things with contrasting colours to take advantage of possible residual vision!

4. Select play subjects with relevance to a child's environment and experience!

5. Give your child a chance to imitate certain household activities or to help you doing some housework!

6. Mind that your child's radius of playing action is not kept too narrow, and take it to playgrounds!

7. See that your child has playmates!

8. Teach your child social behaviours by joining rôle plays (e. g. buyer and salesman in a shop)!

Speech and thought in conjunction with activities will give the child steadily growing knowledge of objects and phenomena relating to natural and social environments. The axiomatic postulation of Marxist psychology that a personality is formed by activity applies to all, including the blind child. Movement, oral communication, and action, therefore, are important tasks which must be accomplished in early education. Parents and educationists in charge of blind children in infant and pre-school age always should be aware of their own role as an activating force to prevent the child's stagnation in passivity.

What, for example, should a father do who is asked by his child the question: "Daddy, what is a camel?" There are many possible replies and responses. The father may postpone his answer to a soon visit of the zoo. He may mould a camel of plasticine and ask his child to help him moulding or remodel another one. He may verbally describe the camel, its size and humps and other details. In the latter case, the child's curiosity may be apparently satisfied — at least for the moment. But what kind of picture has really been generated in the child's mind?

A child is attacked and surrounded by so many terms and notions and impressions of all sorts, day after day. They all penetrate via hearing and the tactile sense. Are so many things digestible without help? No, help must come from parents and educationalists. The cognitive effort of the child has to be encouraged and supported with very much patience. Age-dependent environmental knowledge will help the child for increasingly independent orientation, adaption of behaviours, and expansion of experience. Yet, first of all, the foundation must be built by early education.

Accumulation of basic knowledge, therefore, should not be left to chance. Those children who lack a sense organ, as important as the eye, need more help than others together with a wide variety of inspirations and encouragement for their own age-adequate intellectual growth.

The child will acquire lasting knowledge of its own environment in less time, if always the same verbal definitions are coordinated with the same objects and activities. One should try, therefore, not to use different names for one and the same thing, even if different names are possible and applicable in a given language. Initial experience usually is obtained by the child from itself and its closest environment, including its own body, personal hygiene, the mother, meals, bathing, dressing and undressing, walking, playing, and other elements of a normal child's everyday life. The child should be addressed in simple phrases in the context of all those activities. Things which are being handled on a certain occasion should be called by name and offered to the child for touching.

Watering the flowers has been his duty for a long time

Soon comes the time, when the child must collect more comprehensive knowledge of its clothing, toys, room furniture, and family life. That then will have to be followed by more familiarity with other persons and their names, the garden, the street, plants, animals, as well as weather and weather effects. Walking downtown or going shopping, the child will gradually begin to distinguish environmental sounds, such as the noise of passing motor-cars, and it will perceive the warming rays of the sun. That will be the way of learning how to use the other senses, those which are intact. It will learn to follow up outside developments, recognise implications, and interpret perceptions. A child permitted to imitate its parents' activities or encouraged to join in carrying them out will soon acquire its own independent skills and knowledge. The work done by adults in the house or on the job can be easily simulated and demonstrated by using domestic utensils and toys instead of the real tools and machines. The child thus will steadily expand its own treasure of experience, imagination, and factual knowledge.

Challenge is essential to blind children, just as it is in education at large. The child, in agreement with its age, must be orientated to meeting certain demands. Pampering and saving a child from all activities it could do are not helpful at all. There are many possibilities also for blind children to give other people a helping hand, which is important not only for learning certain manipulations, but for learning social behaviours and assuming decent attitudes. A child early encouraged to independent activity with a resulting sense of accomplishment will continue to be independent and active in adult life.

The child can be asked to remove dust from the furniture, water the flowers, dry the dishes, lay the table, tidy up its playing corner, and many other things. Some patience, of course, will be required to teach it all the manipulations, but success will be an incentive and booster of self-confidence.

Never should parents allow themselves to be distracted from such effort, say, by "well-meaning" relatives or neighbours who are just staring at "the poor blind child" without understanding how detrimental their concern is to the child's own progress. Even the child itself may participate in enlightening such people by its own example, however, with due regard of its limitations which actually exist and must be explained with patience by the parents.

It is important that frequent opportunity is given to a blind child for repeating things experienced and learned, in order to consolidate its acquired skills without hastiness and outside pressure, for example, dressing, touching things, and orientation in space.

Sometimes, parents of a blind child are quite happy with their child's theoretical knowledge and eloquence. However, verbal knowledge is not sufficient. It is more important to link the words used with proper ideas. Those sensual perceptions that may partially compensate for the absence of vision are of particular importance in the cognitive process of blind children. There are many types of exercises which are target-oriented and, therefore, contribute to the improvement of hearing and tactile sense.

A child, in its first year of age, can recognise by hearing its mother on entering the room. Knowledge about persons can be expanded, if those persons establish contact with and talk to the child, when entering the room. The child, in the course of time, will have to learn to differentiate sounds by type, course, and direction and to coordinate them with activities and events. In a hearing exercise, something may be offered for touching, with its specifiic sound being made heard and its name given. As the exercise proceeds, the same thing may be offered for recognition by sound only, with no touching nor verbal definition. All acoustic phenomena of the environment have to be explained. A little walk outside will readily reveal a great number of acoustic informations transmitted and received.

For an infant odour exercises will begin with the meals. Experience of

Up to now she has known it only in slices

differentiation then will be expanded by additional environmental effects in free nature. Smells, like hearing, can be aids for orientation. Improvement of the tactile sense is of particular importance as a major tool by which the child will get ideas about shape, size, consistency, and surface condition. Profound training of the tactile sense will facilitate reading and writing, later on, reading of palpable pictures and maps and, consequently, be a good basis for classroom learning.

Any information received through the blind infant's touching hands must be accompanied by verbal explanation. If it holds an apple in its hands, it must be given the word "apple". Then gradually a lasting association will be build up between a certain object touched and its name. Of course, the sense of taste will additionally come in, when food is concerned.

A child, in its third year of age, should be given not only cut and minced food; it should become familiar with different types of food and with the various stages of food preparation. There is no other way for the child to learn that the potato, for example, has a peel and that the raw product gives boiled, fried or mashed potatoes or potatoes in their skins.

The child should be asked to carry out most various activities, using for them most various objects and utensils, with the view to upgrading its tactile sense and brainwork capacity. Presentation and imitation are among the principal approaches to cognition. A praise will prove to be a great inspiration for a child who, for the first time, has succeeded in plugging hollow cubes into each other, stringing beads or arranging its toys.

Comparison of two or more things of the same type will be one of the next steps, for example, spoons or balls of different shapes or sizes. It will learn that there are two spoons, but one of them is bigger than the other. That will add to its understanding of variety in environment and of the fact that often one term can stand for many things. One must never hold a child's touching hands. Let the child repeat the touching move, if necessary for clarity, but with no physical guidance. No intake of knowledge will be possible unless the child is allowed to perceive and associate things independently. Touching has to be done in a certain sequence, for example, by asking the child: "Show me this first, that second, and so on . . ." Such patterns of activity will be impressive and helpful in gaining elementary knowledge. The child should acquire not only knowledge of its social and natural environment, but also skills for independent expansion of that knowledge.

Residual vision, if any, must be activated and mobilised by exercise, since even the smallest residue of vision will sizeably facilitate orientation. Carried out in early childhood, such exercises will help to define the degree of optical performance still at the disposal of the blind person. The following exercises with gradually growing demands are possible in such cases:

(a) Distinction between bright and dark;

(b) Tracing of slowly moving objects;

(c) Recognition, comparison, and differentiation of objects by colour and shape;

(d) Search for, detection, and getting of objects within the field of vision;

(e) Painting with strong colours.

Listening to and retelling of stories, description of action, and independent activity after verbal instruction are likely to assume growing importance in pre-school age. That is why admission to kindergarten is strongly recommended for blind children. In a kindergarten environment the child will have plenty of opportunity for learning social behaviours, for which sometimes no chance exists in the family. In a kindergarten staffed with experienced nursery school teachers the child may well acquire the knowledge and skills it will require later for successful school entry.

5.

How to prepare the blind child for school

In the GDR, compulsory school age starts in the seventh year of age, a mandatory rule that applies to all, including blind children. Successful early education at home or in kindergarten will have made them physically and mentally fit for school by that time. Their behaviours and attitudes will have been developed to an extent by which no problems should be expected at school entry.

Neither excessive demands nor limitations should be applied to a child who is prepared for school. Parents whose children have been booked into a special school for the blind will receive special teachers' and educationists' advice even in the pre-school period. Such advice usually is quite complex and includes mutual visits of teachers and parents, courses for parents and their children, regular learning and playing days during the last year before school entry, and hints in publications. It actually is a large programme intended to make children fit for classroom learning and to lay the foundations for successful school education at large.

The officers at all levels of Blinden-und-Sehschwachen-Verband der DDR are among those who give greatest attention to best possible early registration, early education, and parents' guidance, with the view to providing for all blind children optimum prerequisites for efficient classroom performance and education in general.

Educational standards in compliance with school requirements must have been reached up to school entry. However, since individual characteristics are well known to undergo different developments, no complete and generally

Next time he will manage it without help

valid catalogue can be compiled to give a definite list of knowledge and skills that must be expected from a school beginner. The answer to this general question should be the criterion: Is the child capable and ready to start learning at classroom level? Such readiness and capability and an attitude of looking forward to being in school, those are the most important conditions for school at all. All physical and mental aspects of the child must be promoted in preparation for school, and the better a child's physical fitness, the earlier will it be able to meet school demands. The child must acquire hygiene habits, such as body and teeth cleaning, dressing and undressing, all without any help from other persons. The child must be taught to know what its personal belongings are and how to keep them in good order.

The attitude and general outlook of the child should have undergone some change in the pre-school period, in that wishful thinking, egocentricity, and a fairy-tale world have been gradually replaced by a realistic approach to

If she will furnish her own flat in the same way one day?

life. The choice between day-dreams and reality is made increasingly to the benefit of realistic decisions. The initial predominance of the child's own wishes and demands is increasingly replaced by compliance with the demands made upon the child by adults. The child has learnt to fulfil tasks and is happy when success is achieved.

The change of an infant to the standards of a pre-school child may be traced most clearly from the approach to playing. The infant will just handle its own toys, whereas the pre-school child has developed step by step higher forms of playing.

By referring again to constructional playing activity, described in Chapter 5, ("I am building a city") and comparing it with the rôle play ("I am a building worker and build a city") one will understand that work-oriented education begins in the phase of playing. A good service can be rendered to adequate preparation for school by taking that work-play relationship into deliberate consideration, since while the pre-school age is characterised by playing, the school age will be characterised by learning and work. Special encouragement, therefore, should be given to playing activity.

Picture-books are as well important for school beginners, printed in strong colours for those with residual vision or in relievo for those without. The shapes used in such picture-books should be simple, the contours clear. Those with embossed printing should be suitable for touching perception and depict things that can be described by the child and compared with equivalents in reality.

A decisive role in preparing children for school is played by art and aesthetic education, drawing, modelling, singing, instrument playing, story-telling and retelling, and stage-acting in fairy-tale plays.

The intellectual capacity of a school beginner may be measured by emotional quality and determination in the context of social integrability, coordination of speech and thought, and existence of elementary knowledge in line with school entry requirements. The following qualities and knowledge are expected from a school beginner:

(a) Attentive learning attitude;

(b) Capability of smooth and speedy learning;

(c) Verbal definition of things and their purpose and their coordination with more general categories;

(d) Expression of ideas in clear and simple phrases;

(e) Identification of quantitative relations, such as more, less, and equal;

(f) Identification of contrast, such as good, evil, big, small, loud, and low;

(g) Command of numbers from one to ten.

A school beginner should be able to give his name and address. He should know about events of general importance and participate in social life with all children. Learning in a classroom community is a subject of kindergarten education for all, including blind children. All birthdays of group members will be celebrated by the whole group which also will take joint action in preparing national and international holidays. Living, playing, learning, and working in a community are taught at the earliest possible date. They are guided to give up egocentrism for collectivism, to look forward to entering school and to get prepared for school and life in a socialist society. Such guidance is based on concerted action of parents, educationists, and nursery school teachers.

6.

What help can parents provide in educating blind school children?

School entry marks an important threshold in life. Due consideration must be given to that extraordinary event by the child's family, friends, and neighbours. Admission to school is a feast throughout the country, with meetings and celebrations and all sorts of functions being organised for the school beginners everywhere. Happiness and pride are in the hearts of the children, when they carry their satchels for the first time.

Admission to a special school for blind children is just the same great thing and considered as a festive event by those concerned. All parents should be aware of that important aspect and not indulge in suffering under apparent separation from their children. All is done by the teachers and other educationists to make school entry a great unforgettable experience for the small ones, and the parents concerned should back those efforts.

The last year before school entry is used to make the young candidates for admission to a special school for the blind acquainted with "their" school. They will be invited for some days of playing and learning right on the spot and for sleeping several nights in their future boarding house. They will meet their classmates, teachers, and other educationists, with all being done to making them looking forward to their definite move into the residential school. While parents, no doubt, may be somewhat grieved with their children's exodus from home, they must share the child's happiness with imminent school entry or even encourage such happiness. Such courage will be facilitated by the definite knowledge that in the special school children, in spite of blindness, will receive profound education and the capacities for keeping up with the performance of sighted people in the long run. The better they

The very first day at school — a feast not only because of the sweets

have managed to educate their pre-school child to independence, the less problems will the child have in getting used to life in the boarding school and learning in a classroom community.

Many years of experience in the education of blind people have shown that at least one year of kindergarten education is highly beneficial to classroom success. In kindergarten many skills are taught which will be useful for learning at school, and a kindergarten child has already been away from home, so that school entry will not coincide with first separation from home. They will begin at school together with their kindergarten playmates with whom they had shared one and the same kindergarten dormitory. Therefore, they will not be exposed to abrupt change of environment and company, but begin with classroom learning in an atmosphere in which they already feel "at home".

The hints given to parents in the previous chapters had been related to early education in infant and pre-school age. They were applicable mainly to education in a family environment. However, parents' responsibility for education does not at all end at their children's admission to a residential school for blind pupils.

Parents of blind infants often are quite helpless, for they do not know how to educate their children to attitudes and performance not different from the behaviours of sighted children in comparable age groups.

Parents of blind school children sometimes are helpless, for they do not know how to take influence on education, when their children are in a residential school and return only for visits now and then.

Therefore, first of all must all parents be made well aware of their continued responsibility for their child's personality. Their educational influence must not be disrupted. Cooperation between parents and school is a major policy of education throughout the GDR and fully applicable to the education of blind children as well. Special schools, just as all others, have parents' committees at school and class levels, and all teachers are highly interested in close contact with their pupils' parents.

Cooperation will be a bit more difficult for local separation. Distances between the site of the school and the pupils' homes sometimes are too long to maintain a daily flow of information on school developments, and parents cannot be available in person for direct share in education. Nevertheless, there are many possibilities to establish close links and continuity in family-school cooperation. There are, for example, the socalled travelling days at the beginning and end of school vacations. According to the rules of education, a maximum of six weeks of learning must be followed by a vacational period for relaxation. Fathers and mothers should come in person to collect their children and to accompany them back to school and take the opportunity for consultations with teachers and educationists. A child under very fresh impression will more comprehensively and with less reluctance report good and bad school experience, problems and success, and parents are much more easily involved to share everything. It is, however, an unfortunate experience that some parents appreciate their children's successfully achieved independence by letting them travel alone. They are simply not aware that joint travelling should be undertaken not only to accompany the child, but also to meet the teachers.

This is her task during the holidays

However, such consultation is particularly necessary for older pupils for whom travel company seems to be superfluous. Necessary subjects of such consultation include age-dependent growth problems and vocational prospects.

Parents' meetings will be organised on the premises of the school, with attending parents being given detailed information about school developments and useful suggestions on what they should do about school and progress of their children. In other words, they will be given a real chance to take influence on training and education.

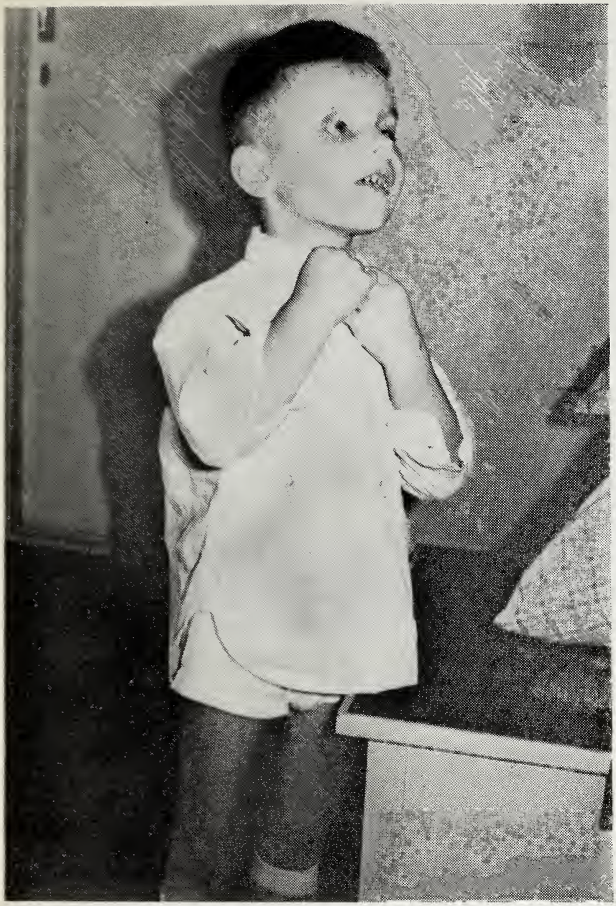
Such oral exchange of information and experience may be complemented by correspondence, all designed to ensuring for the parents an opportunity for continued control. Braille will be taught in the lowest grade to an extent that the child can write small letters home. The educationists at school see that this is regularly done. Parents should bear in mind the urgent necessity of replying to such letters and answering all questions asked in them.

It is not at all difficult for sighted people to learn braille, and parents should not be reluctant to do so. The local officers of Blinden-und-Sehschwachen-Verband der DDR and the teachers of the nearest special school will be helpful by all means. It is a beautiful experience for a blind child away from home to be in more frequent contact with its parents by reading their letters without other people's assistance.

Educational influence from home can take direct and indirect effect by regular correspondence, in that the blind child at the residential school remains to be involved in family life. Example, of tremendous importance to the child's personality, will be effective on education, if parents report success on the job and in society at large or give their views on topical developments in the public or on the child's attitudes and performance. The child remains to be closely linked with parents, sisters, and brothers, notwithstanding geographical distance between them. It will not be under the impression of taking a special position because of its blindness.

The child's vacational visits home are of great importance. Parents should resist the temptation of pampering. Delight with meeting after some time of separation is great on either side, but should never be allowed to spoil the school's effort for education of an independent and responsible personality.

Parents soon will learn that their child is becoming increasingly independent from visit to visit and that it commands more and more skills. The child is in a process of growth, not only physically, but also in terms of knowledge, performance, activity, attitudes, and behaviours. Parents must appreciate that progress and adjust their own educational efforts to it. They can support their child's self-confidence by taking notice of their child's progress, as recordable from visit to visit.



The last button is the most difficult one

Parents should carefully think over what could be done to add to such progress during longer visits at home, in the winter and summer vacations. For example, they should try to teach their child things which, generally, cannot be taught as effectively at school. Private talk is of enormous importance. Parents should converse with their child as often as possible and on most various subjects. Conversation is an efficient tool by which to enlarge the child's horizon in all respects, politics, philosophy, factual knowledge, culture, aesthetics, ethics, and morality, a tool by which to awake positive attitudes.

Joint walks, sports, travels, theatre, concert, and even shopping can be means to enrich the child's experience, add to its imagination and to its knowledge about the general environment.

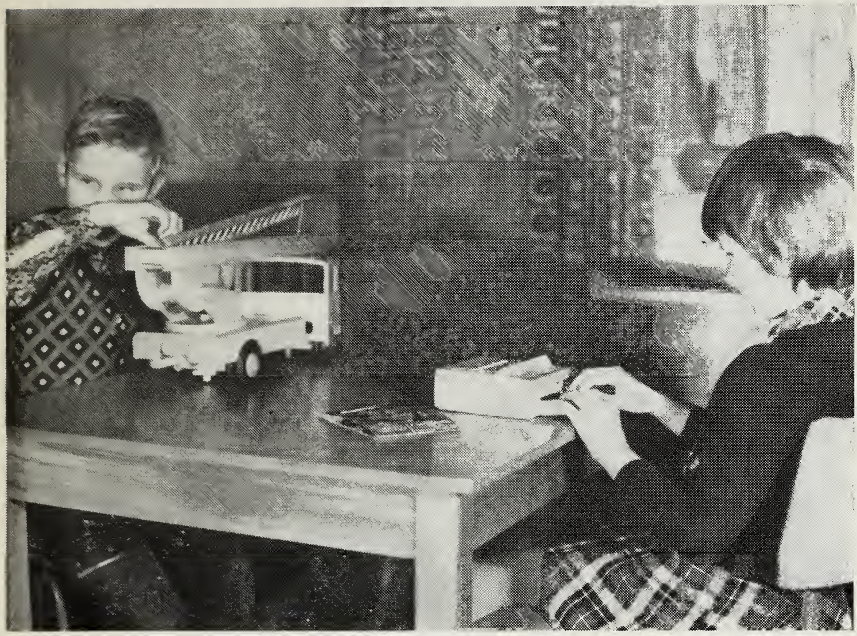
The principles established for the education of the blind child in pre-school age apply as well to the school child, albeit at a different level. Parents should never forget that many an observation cannot be made by an unsupported blind individual whose sensual impressions are limited and many perceptions incomplete. Parents aware of those restrictions will deliberately draw certain things to the child's attention and thus encourage observation. They will explain and describe in greater detail phenomena not sufficiently perceived or recognised.

Continued traffic education is essential. The child must get accustomed to independent orientation in traffic environment. It must learn how to behave at crossings, how to use public transport, and how to ask for support, if needed.

The residential school child will be taught not only how to do very personal duties, but also how to accomplish tasks for its classroom community and social responsibilities of benefit to the community in a wider context. Education by work must be continued by the parents, when the child is on holidays at home. Parents all too often are inclined to wait on their blind child and push it into a special position in the family.

Advantage can be taken of so many ways to consolidate and expand skills and attitudes learnt at school. Children may be asked to help in the kitchen and thus will come to know many things with which they will not or rarely come across at school, wrapped bread, bagged potatoes or frozen vegetables. It will learn how to operate all sorts of kitchen equipment, including the gas cooker, and, no doubt, receive insights into the dimensions of domestic work. Gardening is another useful activity in which a blind child can be involved. That will be not only a contribution to education by work, but real involvement on an equal footing in the scope of family activity. It will encourage responsibility and social integration.

Problems relating to the forthcoming vocational career will crop up, as the school child grows up. Parents should not leave occupational guidance entirely to the school board, but rather use their own possibilities to detect and promote their child's interests and inclinations. Close mutual confidence is the best platform on which to talk a child out of unrealistic career ideas. The blind junior should learn a trade which he can practise in his home place, and the parents often will be much better informed than remote school teachers about locally available opportunities.



For children of this age technical toys suit best

Additional guidance and advice for parents and their child may be received from the local officers of Blinden-und-Sehschwachen-Verband der DDR and through contact with blind people already in employment. Parents should try together with their blind children to meet blind people on the job. Parents, hence, have many different possibilities to live up to their educational responsibilities. The child's position both in the family and in the classroom and residential school as a whole will be enhanced by joint action of parents and teachers. That, after all, will create the prerequisites for the blind pupil to become a universally educated and well-balanced personality.

7.

Blinden-und-Sehschwachen-Verband der DDR and its support to parents for child education

Blinden-und-Sehschwachen-Verband (BSV) is the organisation of visually handicapped citizens in the GDR and supports strongly all efforts aimed at ensuring profound education of all blind children and juniors. It is in close cooperation with the boards of special schools and other institutions at various levels of education, public health, and social services to improve registration, involvement, care, and social integration of blind adolescents and, consequently, provide good conditions for their smooth integration with society.

The National Executive of BSV has attached to it a working committee for socialist education with experienced educationists and competent scholars and one member to represent the parents of blind children. That committee has within its scope the drafting of policy documents and rules for BSV activity in the field of education and for cooperation between BSV and other institutions and authorities of education.

The committee has been established as a body for advice and enlightenment of the general public and has a wide range of items on its programme, including early registration, early medical care, early education in the family and special school, advice for parents of blind children, extra-school education, holiday activities, preparation and distribution of school-books, textbooks, and other teaching aids for blind school students and for further education of blind adults.

BSV, together with other bodies and levels of government, is one of the major contributors to registration of and services for blind children and teenagers.

A resolution has been adopted by BSV in March 1973 on advisory services for parents of visually handicapped children. It has provided good conditions necessary for further improvement in that field. In the meantime, an experienced blind-school teacher has been added as parents-briefing officer to the full-time staff of the BSV National Executive.

The briefing officer, for example, may give more comprehensive and extensive instruction in certain serious and sophisticated situations, say, to parents of children with more than one defect or grave retardation. Yet, his first responsibility is to prepare policy documentation and practice-oriented material for the briefing of parents and to train BSV officers at local levels for independent briefing of parents in their locality. Such approach is widening the network of on-the-spot immediate assistance.

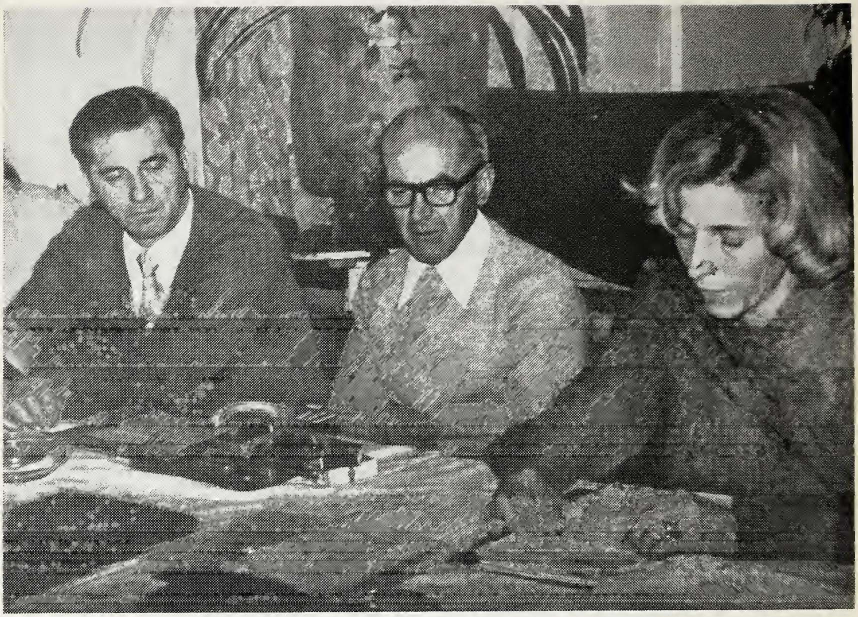
All local executives of BSV are in close contact with all applicable sectors of local government, including medical youth care centres, health departments, and social welfare divisions, as well as with local ophthalmologists and rehabilitation centres, to keep themselves fully informed about all visually handicapped persons in their area. Such information background enables the local executives of BSV to make their own proposals for infant care and early arrangements for admission to kindergartens and special schools. They will give a lot of practical help for actual attendance of school. Specially trained BSV officers will call on parents of blind children to answer questions and advise them on specific action.

The statutes of BSV enable parents to become full members of the organisation, which, no doubt, adds to closer contact and cooperation on many items of importance to blind children.

The National Executive of BSV has instituted special courses for parents and so far recorded good results from them. Parents will be invited to stay for several days, together with their children, for lectures and discussions on the purpose and tasks of blind welfare, education of blind children, as well as on methods and aids for special education.

Such courses have proved to yield multiple benefit for the parents: general and individual instruction, discussion of individual problems and experience with course staff and other parents, comparison of their own child with others, and observation of their own child's behaviours in a group environment. Special teachers, in addition, will demonstrate modern methods and activities that can be used by parents in family education.

Regional meetings of parents are organised for similar purposes. They are convened by the regional executives of BSV in regular intervals and with involvement of the children and juniors. Such meetings have proved to be quite helpful in consolidating contacts between parents, children, and BSV officers, and both parents and children may benefit a lot from meeting



Parents' guidance in practice

blind adults with a record of success in vocational activity and society as a whole. Meetings of that kind often will be attended by representatives of general education, ophthalmologists, and social workers who may give lectures and offer different kinds of advice. Parents' guidance, however, is not restricted to such meetings. BSV publishes "Die Gegenwart", a journal available from the subscription list of Postzeitungsvertrieb, the GDR's national press distribution agency. Other publications are made by BSV for the same purpose, such as the BSV series of brochures, the series "Das blinde und das sehschwache Kind" (The blind and the partially sighted child), and this paper. They are available from all district executives of BSV.

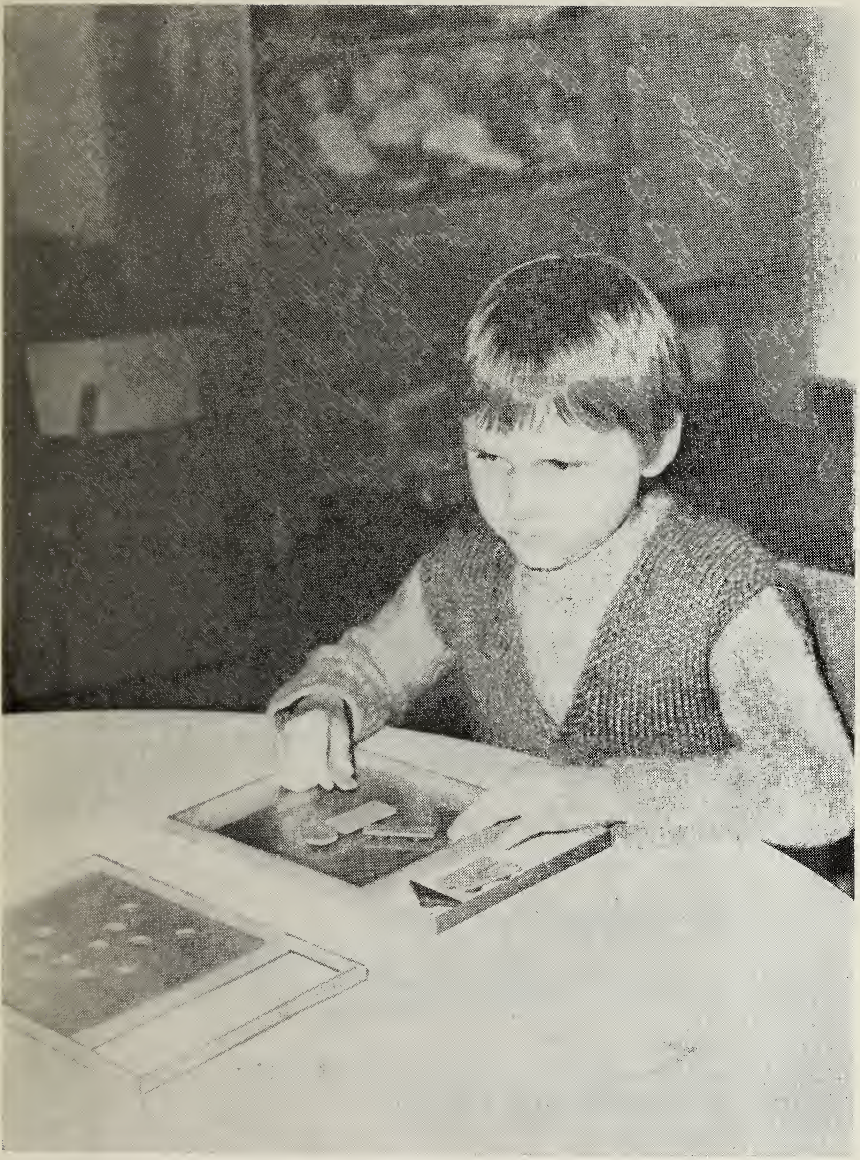
More papers, instructions, circulars, and other publications are in the phase of preparation to add to the effectiveness and continuity of instruction for parents and report latest findings in research and fresh developments in the context of toys and aids.

Recognising the own toys in the relief picture-book

BSV also has organised an international programme of holiday exchange for school children. Many blind children have already received unforgettable experience in this context, which is an additional form of educational aid for parents. Many boys and girls have been given an opportunity to travel to fraternal socialist countries and to make friends with many blind foreign mates in their own age. All that has proved to add to knowledge, experience, and personality. The benefit will be even greater, if evaluated by parents in an educational manner.

Family education of blind children is additionally supported by the BSV's international activities aimed at collecting and evaluating world-wide experience in education of blind children and to convey such first-hand and adequately processed experience to parents in the country. BSV has organised factfinding and study tours abroad, participation in or organisation of international events, and evaluation of international literature, all with the view to keeping parents informed of latest methods for family education and specific aids for all age groups.

Advisory services for parents have thus been strongly extended by BSV in recent years. The initiatives taken by both the National Executive and the local levels of BSV have been highly appreciated by many thankful parents. Those services have become an established institution used by growing numbers of people for advice and instruction and approaches to individual problems. Efforts are systematically made by all BSV staff to offer comprehensive support at the earliest possible date. Those efforts are made with the view to making life happy and meaningful for all blind boys and girls in this country's socialist society.



This magneto-play from our Distribution Centre for Aids for the Blind stimulates the imagination of the child

Contents

Page

Introduction 3

1. The ophthalmologist's view of blindness in child age 6

2. What are the differences between blind and sighted children? 11

3. Specific action for early registration 16

4. Specific early education of blind children — its impact on development in pre-school age 19

5. How to prepare the blind child for school 38

6. What help can parents provide in educating blind school children? 42

7. Blinden-und-Sehschwachen-Verband der DDR and its support to parents for child education 50

HV1974 Ea76 c.1

EARLY EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG BLIND CHILD; ADVICE FOR PARENTS.

(1976)

Date Due

AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND
15 WEST 16th STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10011

Printed in U.S.A.